

In coming to vv18-21—we come to the end of our Savior's discourse with Nicodemus—a passage that provides for us, among many things, a perfect pattern for witnesses or sharing the truth with others—[1] it concerned the entire Trinity—He starts by stressing his need for a new birth, which is the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit—he must believe in Christ and His atoning work—which was given to the world because of the Father's love—the work of the Holy Spirit, the atoning work of Christ upon the cross, and the love of God the Father...

[2] It balanced God's sovereignty and man's responsibility—He begins by telling Nicodemus that unless the Spirit gives him a new birth, he cannot see or enter the kingdom of God—that is—unless the Spirit gives him new life he will never believe—but then, our Savior ends by saying that if he, or anyone else, refuses to believe the guilt for that unbelief belongs entirely to them...

[3] It balanced God's love and His righteous condemnation—our Savior was not afraid to tell Nicodemus that God lovingly gave His Son so that sinners who believe in Him would not perish—condemnation, salvation, heaven, and hell—are all mentioned...

I've decided to consider this passage a bit more thematically—in other words—running through this passage is the theme of condemnation—and I want to suggest three things about it—the meaning of condemnation, the reasons for condemnation, and the remedy to condemnation

- I. The Meaning of Condemnation
- II. The Reason for Condemnation
- III. The Remedy to Condemnation

I. The Meaning of Condemnation

1. The Greek word rendered "condemn" or "condemnation"—literally means—to judge, decide or pronounce..."
2. It refers to the judgment or pronouncement given by a judge—it refers to the sentence bestowed upon a criminal...
3. It's fundamentally the opposite of justification—to justify is to make a pronouncement that a person is righteous...
4. To condemn is to pronouncement a person guilty—it's to make a judgment or decision about a person's status...
5. Thus—simply put—a person condemned is under the just and righteous sentence of God—they are judged guilty...
6. [1] It is a PRESENT condemnation, v18—"He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already..."
7. That is—He is presently judged as guilty—He is presently under the just condemnation of God for his sins...
8. Now—as we are going to see in a minute—failure to believe in Christ will bring additional and further guilt...
9. But—Jesus' point in v18 is—this condemnation is something that's already present—and it's for this reason Christ came...
10. V17—"For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved..."
11. Saved from what?—saved from condemnation—save from the guilt and the eternal punishment of their sins...
12. Thus—regardless if a person every hears and rejects the gospel—he is already condemned because of his sin...
13. Now—the sin for which he is condemned is twofold—he is condemned for Adam's sin and for his own sin...

14. Rom.5:18—"through one transgression (Adam's sin) there resulted condemnation to all men (Adam's race)..."
15. Thus—even if Christ never came into the world—mankind would have already been under God's condemnation...
16. [2] It is an INCREASED condemnation, v19—"And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil..."
17. The phrase—"this is the condemnation" means—this is the reason for their aggravated and increased guilt...
18. Because the light has come into the world—because the gospel was told them—because they heard the truth...
19. Now—it's important to keep in mind—that the purpose of God in giving Christ was not to increase condemnation...
20. V17—"For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved..."
21. But—the rejection of the Son—failure to believe the gospel—renders a person more guilty then if he never heard it...
22. Heb.11:7—"By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith..."
23. Notice—Noah "condemned the world"—by "preparing an ark"—the provision of an ark brought further condemnation upon the world...
24. In other words—they were doubly guilty not only because of their sins—but because they refused to enter the ark...
25. But—and this is important to remember—it was NOT Noah's purpose in building the ark to condemn the world...
26. He built the ark for salvation—he no doubt warned the people about judgment and pointed them to God's provision...
27. So too—God did not send His Son into the world to condemn but save the world—this was His gracious intent...
28. But—to refuse to believe God and accept His salvation—renders a person doubly guilty and worthy of punishment...
29. Now—before I leave this first heading—I want to apply this point by way of WARNING—refusal to believe the gospel results in greater condemnation...
30. Matt.10:14-15—"And whoever will not receive you nor hear your words, when you depart from that house or city, shake off the dust from your feet. Assuredly, I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city..."
31. [a] To reject the gospel is to sin against greater LOVE—I mentioned last week that God's love is seen in many ways...
32. Christ said that His Father's love is evidenced even toward His enemies—in that He sends them rain and sunshine...
33. He shows love by providing for all your temporal and physical needs—by giving you food, clothing, and shelter...
34. For people to receive these temporal blessings and refuse to honor Him for them—is to sin against His love...
35. But—the greatest display of God's love is in the gift of His Son—and to reject that is the greatest possible sin...
36. John Flavel—"If the greatest love has been manifested in giving Christ to the world, then it follows, that the greatest evil and wickedness is manifested in despising, slighting, and rejecting Christ. It is sad to abuse the love of God manifested in the lowest gift of providence; but, to slight the richest discoveries of it, even in that peerless gift, wherein God commends his love in the most taking and astonishing manner; this is sin with a witness..."
37. [b] To reject the gospel is to sin against greater LIGHT—that is—the more you know the more guilt you incur...

38. That is—the more you know—the more responsible you are—and in the end—the more guilty you will be...
39. Ps.19:1-2—"The heavens declare the glory of God...Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night reveals knowledge..."
40. That is—through general revelation—through creation—God reveals the knowledge of Himself to all men...
41. Thus—all men—to a certain extent know about God—they know they owe allegiance to Him as their Creator...
42. This is a very important point—all men are guilty for not believing and improving on the knowledge they have...
43. But—what happens is—when a person hears the gospel—they are now responsible to believe this further revelation...
44. This further revelation—the gospel message—comes with a command to repent and believe on Jesus Christ...
45. Failure to believe this—renders a person doubly guilty—the more knowledge you have the more guilt you have...
46. For example—what if my children have been told in the past—that the first thing they're to do is clean their rooms...
47. Yet—one day one of my children gets up and for various reasons—simply fails to clean their room—perhaps they forgot...
48. Well—they would be guilty because they knew—that it was their responsibility to clean their room every day...
49. But—what if I woke them up—and I specifically told them to clean their room in a certain way and manner...
50. And—what if they refuse to do so—they would be more guilty—because they sinned against greater knowledge...
51. Lk.12:47-48—"And that servant who knew his master's will, and did not prepare *himself* or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many *stripes*. But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more..."

II. The Reason for Condemnation

1. The reason behind this increased condemnation is unbelief—the refusal to come to Christ and believe in Him...
2. Thus—I want to suggest three reasons why unbelief is such a serious thing—the nature, source, and result of unbelief...
3. [1] The NATURE of unbelief, v18—"he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God..."
4. To refuse to believe in Christ is a great sin—it's the refusal to believe what God says about you and Christ...
5. Now—most of us are familiar with the two elements of faith—knowledge, assent, and trust—these comprise faith...
6. Knowledge—for a person to believe he must first understand certain things about God, himself, Christ, and salvation...
7. Assent—that is—you must not only understand certain things—but you must consent these are true of you...
8. Trust—you must not only understand certain things and believe they are true—you must trust Christ for yourself...
9. This is why unbelief is so criminal—you refuse to believe what God says about Himself, you, and His Son...
10. [2] The SOURCE of unbelief, v19—"And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil..."

11. Unbelief is criminal and wicked because it originates from a heart that LOVES darkness and HATES the light...
12. This is WHY man refuses to believe—he refuses to come to Christ—because his heart hates good and loves evil...
13. Now—I can only guess that our Savior is here contrasting man with His Father—God loved the world—man loved darkness...
14. By "darkness" is meant moral evil and wickedness—by "light" is meant moral good, the gospel, and Christ Himself...
15. Throughout John's gospel—Christ is referred to as the Light of the World—because light brings knowledge...
16. To say that man loves darkness and hates the light—does not necessarily mean man lives in open immorality...
17. Nicodemus was a Pharisee and likely an outwardly moral man—he was no drunk, drug abuser, thief, or atheist...
18. But—if men do not love Christ, His law and morality, as defined by His word—then they do not love the light...
19. Man may love many things about religion in general—they may even like the strictness associated with Phariseeism...
20. But—man by nature does not love true religion—that tells us we are sinners and must come empty of any merit...
21. Most people profess to love God and Jesus—but if you begin to describe the Jesus of the Bible—things quickly change...
22. Most people will love and accept a Jesus—providing he conforms to their image of what he should be like...
23. This is why native man will never believe on Christ and come to the light—he loves darkness and hates the light...
24. [3] The WORK of unbelief, v20—"For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed..."
25. Unbelief is criminal and wicked because it not only refused to believe God—it results in all forms of evil behavior...
26. V19—"because their deeds were evil...v20 For everyone practicing evil"—doing evil is the fruit of unbelief...
27. [a] We have great insight into man's native condition—here we actually learn why man refuses to believe in Christ...
28. Man's will is a slave to his heart—what he loves he will always do—man is free to act in accord to what he loves...
29. Historically, there has been no small debate on question of free-will—does man have a free will or does he not...
30. Well—it depends what a person means by free-will—man is free to act of his own will and choice—he is not forced...
31. But—man is only free to act in agreement to his nature—he is not free to act contrary to that nature or heart...
32. For example—a bird is free to be a bird but he is not free to be a fish—he is free to act and do as a bird does...
33. So too—a sinner is free to act in accord to his nature (his preference)—he will always choose what he loves...
34. Thus—it's for this reason that nothing short of a new birth is necessary—if any person is ever to choose Christ...
35. My friends—our will (our chooser) always chooses what we love—put another way—the will is a slave to the affections...
36. Prov.1:29—"Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the LORD"—the will is enslaved to the heart...
37. [b] We have great insight into how behavior is changed—how does God make man willing to choose Christ...

38. Well—the only way man will ever believe on Christ and come to Him—is if his heart is first changed by God...
39. In other words—for man's will to be changed, first his heart needs changing—first the heart and then the will...
40. Well—this pattern is the same for Saints also—our hearts need constant changing that our wills will choose good over evil...
41. A person is not changed by merely being told what to do—the heart must be ongoing changed by the Holy Spirit...
42. In other words—the more our hearts are in love with Christ and His word—the more they desire to follow Him...

III. The Remedy to Condemnation

1. The only remedy provided for poor condemned sinners—is that they believe in Christ, God's only begotten Son...
2. [1] The NATURE of faith, v18—"He who believes in Him is not condemned"—he who personally trusts in Christ...
3. Notice—our Savior makes plain that sinners must do more than merely believe about Christ—they must believe in Christ...
4. The best imagery I know is that of Noah and the Ark—Noah not only believed what God said about the Ark—but he got into it...
5. Rom.8:1—"There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus"—that is—in Christ by faith...
6. Thus—no sooner does a sinner get into Christ—does he believe in Christ—then he's no longer condemned...
7. In other words—what our Savior is here teaching is—justification by faith—as justification is the opposite of condemnation...
8. J.C. Ryle—"The expression '*is not condemned*,' is equivalent to saying 'he is pardoned, acquitted, justified, cleared from all guilt, delivered from the curse of a broken law, no longer counted a sinner, but reckoned perfectly righteous in the sight of God'..."
9. [a] God's provision—that is—His loving provision in giving the world His Son—"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life..."
10. [b] Christ's promise, v18—"He who believes in Him is not condemned"—this is the promise of God's Son...
11. Canons of Dort—"And, whereas many who are called by the gospel, do not repent, nor believe in Christ, but perish in unbelief; this is not owing to any defect or insufficiency in the sacrifice offered by Christ upon the cross, but is wholly to be imputed to themselves..."
12. [2] The RESULTS of faith, v21—"But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God..."
13. It's obvious that v21 is the very opposite of v20—whatever is true of native man—the opposite is true of converted man...
14. Thus—as v20 describes WHAT and WHY unbelievers do what they do—v21 describes WHAT and WHY believers do what they do...
15. [a] He who does the truth comes to the light—to "do the truth" means—to believe on Christ and obey Him...
16. To come to the light means—to come to Christ and His word—it's to come into the searching eye of Scripture...
17. [b] That his deeds may be clearly seen as done in God—in other words—they have nothing to hide—they welcome the light..
18. Why—because they know that their deeds are "done in God"—that is—done by the grace and for the glory of God...
19. Thus—our Savior provides the evidence of true faith—v21 provides a universal description of a true believer...